

Message Text

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TO TIME MAGAZINE NEW YORK IMMEDIATE REPORT DELIVERY

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FOLLOWING REPEAT FROM AMERICAN EMBASSY VIENTIANE
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SUBJ: MESSAGE FOR TIME MAGAZINE

REQUEST DEPARTMENT PASS FOLLOWING MESSAGE TIME MAGAZINE
NEW YORK

"PRESSE URGENT PRIORITY COLLECT
TIME MAGAZINE, NEW YORK, USA
WESTERN UNION TELEX NUMBER 126767
CREDIT CARD NUMBER UW/12021/UW

TO: TIME NATION AND WORLD
CC: NEWSDESK FOR RELAY TO NEWSWEEK
CC: WASHINGTON BUREAU
FM: STROBE TALBOTT, FILING FROM VIENTIANE
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SLUG: WOODCOCK MISSION -- TAKE NINE

"HANOI DEPARTURE AND MADAME BINH MEETING.

"THE REMAINS OF THE TWELVE AMERICAN PILOTS BEGAN THEIR
HOMEWARD JOURNEY SATURDAY. IN A SIMPLE CEREMONY AT GIA
LAM AIRPORT OUTSIDE HANOI, THE METAL BOXES WERE CARRIED

ABOARD THE U.S. AIR FORCE C-141 STARLIFTER THAT HAD FLOWN IN FROM THE PHILIPPINES TO TAKE THE COMMISSION TO VIENTIANE. THE BOXES WERE LINED UP ON A LONG TABLE AT THE FOOT OF THE PLANE'S LOADING RAMP. TWELVE COMMISSIONERS AND STAFF MEMBERS FILED SILENTLY PAST, EACH PLACING A TRIANGULARLY FOLDED AMERICAN FLAG ON EACH BOX. CREW MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORT PLANE THEN CARRIED THE BOXES ABOARD AND SET THEM IN THE CARGO HOLD ONE BY ONE. THE MILITARY MEMBERS OF THE U.S. DELEGATION, WHO HAD BEEN DRESSED IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES THROUGHOUT THEIR STAY IN HANOI, CHANGED INTO UNIFORM FOR THE CEREMONY.

"THE VIETNAMESE REMAINED AT A DISCREET DISTANCE DURING THE OCCASION, THEN USHERED THE AMERICANS INTO THE AIRPORT TERMINAL FOR TEA, COFFEE AND FAREWELL PLEASANTRIES. WOODCOCK PRONOUNCED THE MISSION A SUCCESS AND SAID HE HAD ONLY ONE COMPLAINT: 'YOU FED US TOO MUCH.'

"AS THE AMERICAN TRANSPORT TAXIED FOR TAKEOFF, IT PASSED A C-130 HERCULES AND FOUR C-47S, ALL CAPTURED DURING THE FALL OF SOUTH VIETNAME AND REPAINTED WITH VIETNAMESE AIR FORCE MARKINGS.

"REMINDERS, SUBTLE AND OTHERWISE, OF THE WAR KEPT CROPPING UP UNTIL THE HOUR OF THE GROUP'S DEPARTURE. CROSSING LONG BIEN BRIDGE ON THE WAY TO GIA LAM AIRPORT, I SAW A WORKMAN REPAIRING RAILWAY TIES ON THE BRIDGE.

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HE WAS WEARING A PAIR OF KEDS TENNIS SHOES THAT APPEARED BRAND NEW, OBVIOUSLY EXPROPRIATED FROM A P.X. IN THE SOUTH AND SHIPPED NORTH AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE FAMOUR HO CHI MINH SANDALS MADE FROM TIRE RUBBER.

"EN ROUTE TO THE AIRPORT, MY VIETNAMESE ESCORT BEGAN DEMONSTRATING HIS IMPRESSIVE REPERTOIRE OF AMERICAN ROMANTIC AND POP SONGS. THEN HE SANG SOME SONGS OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT IN THE U.S. AS AN ENCORE, HE SANG A VIETNAMESE BALLAD COMMEMORATING FIRST NAME TK MORRISON, THE AMERICAN WAR RESISTER WHO BURNED HIMSELF IN PROTEST. THE VIETNAMESE LYRICS INCLUDED THE LINES: 'IN WASHINGTON TONIGHT THE FLAME OF BATTLE BURNS HIGH. MORRISON, MORRISON, WHEN WE HEARD YOUR SINGING, THE TRUTH, TOO, BURNED BRIGHT. WE WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR NAME AND YOUR ACT.

"(UNFORTUNATELY, NO ONE IN THE AMERICAN DELEGATION IS ABLE TO REMEMBER MORRISON'S FIRST NAME, SO PLEASE CHECK

ON YOUR END.)

"MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN, WHO IS DIRECTOR OF THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND, CAME TO HANOI WITH A SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE FATE OF ORPHANS AND ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN OF U.S. SERVICEMENT (SEE TAKE ONE). THE VIETNAMESE ARRANGED FOR HER TO VISIT A DAY CARE CENTER. IT WAS A MODEL, IF NOT A POTEMKIN, FACILITY. MINISTER OF EDUCATION MADAME NGUYEN THI BINH ADMITTED AS MUCH WHEN SHE TOLD EDELMAN, 'THE SCHOOL YOU VISITED, FRANKLY, IS ONE OF OUR BEST.' "MADAME BINH GAINED WORLDWIDE PUBLICITY DURING THE WAR AS THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM, THE POLITICAL WING OF THE VIET CONG.

"IN THEIR MEETING, EDELMAN PRESSED MADAME BINH FOR AN ESTIMATE ON HOW MANY CHILDREN U.S. SOLDIERS LEFT BEHIND, UNCLASSIFIED

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EXPLAINING THAT KNOWING THE FIGURE MIGHT HELP HEIGHTEN A SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THOSE CHILDREN BACK IN THE U.S.

"DESPITE REPEATED REQUESTS FOR THE INFORMATION, MADAME BINH FIRMLY BUT POLITELY DECLINED TO GIVE ANY NUMBERS. 'THE STATISTICS DON'T REALLY MATTER,' SAID MADAME BINH. 'WE CONSIDER ALL CHILDREN OF VIETNAMESE PEOPLE (MEANING VIETNAMESE MOTHERS IN THIS CASE) AS OUR CHILDREN. WE DO NOT DISCRIMINATE. CHILDREN ARE CHILDREN. IF THEY LACK SOMETHING, THEY ALL LACK IT, AND IF THEY GAIN, THEY ALL GAIN.'

"MADAME BINH PREFERRED TO STRESS OTHER STATISTICS: SHE CLAIMED THAT THERE ARE HALF A MILLION CHILDREN IN ORPHANAGES THROUGHOUT VIETNAM, THAT IN THE NORTH THERE ARE 300,000 CHILDREN WHO LOST THEIR FATHERS IN THE WAR, AND THAT 2,000 SCHOOLS WERE DESTROYED BY THE AMERICAN BOMBING.

"AT THE END OF THE MEETING, EDELMAN GAVE MADAME BINH A GREEN 'CHILDREN FIRST' BUTTON WITH THE INSIGNIA OF THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND.

"SOME MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION WANTED TO VISIT HO CHI MINH'S MAUSOLEUM DURING THE STAY IN HANOI, BUT, MUCH TO THE RELIEF OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS ACCOMPANYING THEM, THE MAJORITY DECIDED AGAINST GOING TO THE MAUSOLEUM. THE REASON, ACCORDING TO A COMMISSION MEMBER: 'WE DECIDED THAT IT MIGHT LOOK BAD BACK IN THE STATES, ESPECIALLY WITH THE FAMILIES OF WAR DEAD AND

MIA'S, IF WE APPEARED TO BE PAYING HOMAGE TO HO.'

"THE COMMISSION FLEW ON TO VIENTIANE WITHOUT MUCH HOPE
OF SATISFACTION FROM THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT OF LAOS.
WOODCOCK DESCRIBED THE LAOS STOP AS 'PRO FORMA.'
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ANOTHER AMERICAN SAID, 'AFTER HANOI, I'M AFRAID THIS
MAY BE SOMETHING OF AN ANTICLIMAX.'

"--END MAIN FILE. UPDATING TK AS AVAILABLE.

"(NOTE TO NEWSDESK: AM STAYING IN ROOM 111 RPT 111 OF
THE LANE XANG HOTEL IN LAOS. PLEASE DIRECT CABLE TO ME
THROUGH MAIN POST OFFICE, VIENTIANE.)

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